

**MINUTES**

**MEETING June 30, 2011**

Present: Tim Bowman (Chair). Jane Feinberg, Sara Masucci, Jennifer Page, Wendy Rundle, Michael Sattler, Paul Solomon

Guest: Kevin Cunningham (School Committee Liaison)

Meeting convened by the Chair at 7:10 pm.

**I. APPROVE MINUTES OF JUNE 16**

Minutes approved unanimously without amendment.

**II. MEET BELMONT**

A request for volunteers for the August 30 event appeared in today's edition of the Belmont Citizen Herald.

**III. RECRUITMENT OF NEW VIC MEMBERS**

Several possible candidates were mentioned. It was agreed that the VIC member who initiates conversations with a candidate will meet with the candidate and another VIC member, will give the candidate a copy of the vision, and extend an invitation to attend a VIC meeting.

**IV. VIC PLANNING:**

- **CITIZEN ACADEMY:** discussion postponed.
- **BUDGET PROCESS BENCHMARKING WITH OTHER TOWNS** (Jane Feinberg, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon): An autumn meeting was proposed, as a continuing iteration of Envision Belmont (see the document distributed by the chair with the agenda for this meeting).

The following issues in the proposal were discussed:

\* A presentation by Robert Mahoney, Chair of the Economic Development Committee and president of the Belmont Savings Bank.

Jennifer noted that Mr. Mahoney, in a presentation to the Planning Board, stated that in the future the town would need \$4M each year beyond any current anticipated increase in revenue to balance its budget. He noted that a part of this gap could be addressed by development in Cushing and Waverley Squares, the Uplands, and South Pleasant St. There was consensus that Mr. Mahoney's presentation, currently proposed to stand alone in the 3:15-3:45 time slot in the agenda was too narrow, and should be part of a larger

panel discussion which would describe the budget gap and the ways to bridge it, including overrides, efficiencies, regionalization, and development.

These options could be presented to those attending the meeting as a “diversified portfolio”, which attendees could choose from. The VIC would be acting as a catalyst, informing residents and putting them in the role of decision makers.

\* It was noted that the item in the 2:30-3:15 time slot (“interactive budget simulation-----”) needed more context, and that the first half of the proposed meeting would be devoted to what other towns do, and the rest to what Belmont does in the budget process.

Kevin Cunningham noted that while he believes that Belmont’s current budget process is “broken”, he questions whether the problem is the process or the results of the process. He distributed a proposal that he and fellow School Committee member Laurie Slap had submitted to the School Committee for a “Subcommittee to Prepare for Long-term Financial Planning for the Belmont Public Schools”. He stated that School Committee members would meet with members of the Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee to address issues related to the two committees’ interactions during the budget process. The key efforts of the proposed subcommittee would be:

1. Make recommendations to improve the current yearly budget process;
2. Analyze and document the Belmont Public Schools as a complex financial system;
3. Make a recommendation as to whether/how the School Committee should form a finance Subcommittee.

The first and third recommendations would be addressed before the second. The latter would involve creating a framework for looking at the financial aspects of the whole school system. He described the process as “not building scenarios, but creating a process to which scenarios could be applied”.

It was agreed that the VIC’s and School Committee’s activities are complementary and that members of the VIC could meet with Kevin and Laurie Slapp to continue the discussion.

## V. OTHER BUSINESS

The next meeting will be July 14. “The Citizen’s Academy” will be on the agenda for July 28.

Jennifer will assess members’ preference for a meeting night in the fall.

## VI. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Paul Solomon  
Secretary Pro Tem

## Final - Meeting Minutes for July 28, 2011

Members present: Jane Feinberg, Sara Masucci (Vice Chair), Jennifer Page, Wendy Rundle

Others present: Kevin Cunningham, Liaison from School Committee

Meeting convened by chair at 7: 05pm in the Flett room of the Library.

**1. Minutes:** Minutes of the July 14<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved as written by Tim and amended by Paul.

**2. Meet Belmont:** Jennifer provided an update including that there were ads in the Citizen Herald and on Belmont Media advertizing the event. She handed out 3 different sized flyers for posting starting after August 10<sup>th</sup>. It was agreed that locations would be handled as follows:

Sara:

- Playgrounds & Pool
- Hillside Hardware

Jane:

- Cushing Sq, some churches and Temple Beth El

Wendy:

- Belmont Cinema area through Waverly Square
- Brigham's

For Paul, Michael and/or Tim at next VIC meeting:

- Bus stops
- Churches, synagogue
- Real estate offices
- Belmont Center

We agreed that we would post as appropriate and as we frequented establishments on Belmont Street toward Cambridge (e.g. Sofra), and Blanchard and Brighton Street (e.g. Zeff Photo, Pepperidge Farm).

**3. Recruitment of New VIC Members:** Wendy reported that Mark Wert is interested in sitting in on a VIC meeting but was unable to attend tonight's meeting. He will try to attend a meeting in the near future.

**4. VIC Planning:**

Citizens Academy: We discussed the outline of ideas for the Citizens Academy that Wendy drafted. There was general support for the concept and approach. It was suggested that perhaps this could be a "second semester" course offered through Belmont Continuing

Education, and a spring VIC activity. Jennifer mentioned that last year the LWV offered a course on how to run for Town Meeting Member, which was well-attended. Perhaps VIC could collaborate with the LWV on the Citizens Academy. This timing might work best given our expectation to be holding an annual public forum in the fall. Jennifer will follow-up with the LWV contact. Wendy will get more information from Lexington.

Budget Process Benchmarking:

- Michael was tasked with drafting a Creative Memo on the late September/early October panel/forum.
- It was agreed that time was quickly passing and we need a work plan and timeline.
- Jane plans a mid-August conversation with Geoff Beckwith of MMA.
- Jane will plan to connect with MAPC at some point following meeting with MMA. MAPC will be a good resource on regionalization.
- Jane will initiate conversations with the new Assistant Town Administrator, the new Acting Superintendent, and Bob Mahoney at BSB in an effort to learn from people who have experiences from other communities.
- Members thought that the Lexington budget materials were a good example of what can be presented on the topic in a straightforward and effective manner. There was interest in learning more about the “Municipal Yardstick” mentioned in those materials. Specifically, what communities are comparable to Belmont? What criteria are used? This is a topic the MMA can also assist with.
- There was interest in doing a budgeting exercise at the Fall forum – something engaging and fast that doesn’t need a lot of set up. Another thought is to share \$100 budget breakdowns from various towns; that is, using a budget of \$100, what is the proportion of funds spent in different service areas.
- Side comment: Is it true that Belmont doesn’t tax commercial and residential properties differently? If so, why? *(Turns out the answer is yes, Belmont doesn’t tax commercial and residential differently)*

Wendy raised some examples of Needham’s budget and budgeting process, and suggested a possible panel speaker if the committee wants to follow up.

We wondered what percentage of citizen participation (and how is that defined) occurs in other towns? Is Belmont really that different?

It will be great if we can report on progress made in Belmont from the Schools, the Warrant Committee, the BOS, and others as a result of recent efforts.

**5. Other Business:** Kevin Cunningham provided an update on several initiatives relating to improving government communications and citizen engagement:

- The Town Meeting Ad Hoc committee on Town Meeting Communications met with the BOS to share its recommendations.
- Some of the activities that a Town Meeting Member Association (TMMA) might do have overlap with some of the efforts the VIC is considering. The TMMA would focus on town meeting members and the VIC effort is focused on the general public but there is great overlap.

- Laurie Slap and Kevin met with the Education Subcommittee of the Warrant Committee to discuss improving communication and collaboration going forward. The School Committee was interested in trying to better understand some of the Warrant Committee's requests, why the Warrant Committee needs that information, and figure out a way for the School Committee to collect that data and make it available. Kevin is interested in better understanding the metrics that the Warrant Committee thinks the School Committee should/could have.
- The Warrant Committee agrees that there should be a finance subcommittee of the School Committee. This would make the budget process smoother.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Wendy Rundle, Secretary Pro Tem